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SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS DISCUSS THE 2007 ELECTIONS

REF: RABAT 986

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T Riley, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On June 29, five political party leaders gathered to discuss the 2007 elections with the Ambassador, DCM and visiting NEA DAS Gordon Gray. The five leaders represented the Istiqlal, Justice and Development (PJD), Progress and Socialism (PPS), Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Democratic Forces Front (FFD) parties. The latter member was the only female parliamentarian who participated. None of the party leaders were willing to discuss their individual party platform discussions for 2007. They were, however, engaged in describing the significance of Morocco's recent reforms and pointed out to each other how their parties differed. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The five political party leaders who met with the Ambassador, DCM and visiting NEA DAS Gordon Gray on June 29 were: Mohammed Messari (Istiqlal Party, PI), Lahcen Daoudi (Justice and Development Party, PJD), Khalid Naciri (Party of Progress and Socialism, PPS), Driss Lachgar (Socialist Union of Popular Forces, USFP), and Bouchra El Khyari (Democratic Forces Front, FFD). (Note: El Khyari is the president of the Women's Parliamentary Forum. End Note.) Speaking for the five leaders, Naciri noted that recent developments in Gaza were a source of great concern to the parliament at the outset of the meeting.

Democratic Reforms: Will they Continue or Halt?

¶3. (C) The party leaders agreed with Naciri when he summarized Morocco's situation vis-a-vis the 2007 elections. The elections are an opportunity for Morocco to transition to a "mature process of institutionalized democracy," according to Naciri. Naciri emphasized that Morocco can continue on the democratic reform course or it can call a halt to these reforms and it is the 2007 election which will determine the next steps. He continued by raising the question: "Are we (Morocco) capable of consolidating the reforms?"

¶4. (C) While Messari agreed that there is a "march towards democracy with the monarchy," he also said that democracy is a process and it will take "decades" to achieve it in Morocco. He argued that the political parties must mobilize the population with a message that will organize voters. El Khyari agreed with Messari that democracy will take time. She mentioned the 2004 Family Law Code ("moudawanna") as an

example of radical and positive change under the King, but anticipated an ongoing struggle for women. She suggested that one-third of the parliament should be women and that it was shameful that there are only three women in the senate. When challenged by Daoudi about her desire for one-third of the parliament to be women, she indicated she would settle for twenty percent. Messari interrupted the exchange between El Kyari and Daoudi by pointing out that ten years ago there were not any women in the parliament.

The PJD's View and Reactions to It

15. (C) Daoudi said "we (the PJD) in the opposition," believe there is no more political reform and that those hoping for reform will have to wait at least until 2012. He based his comments on the ballot method being discussed in parliament. His opinion is that smaller parties will not and cannot win in the elections under the election law currently under consideration. These elections, for Daoudi, will be no different than the ones in 2002. There is a "balkanization" of political parties in Morocco, according to Daoudi, who sees too many small parties and no one representing the far left. He decidedly said that Morocco has missed its democratic opportunity and the existing majority will continue. The December 2006 Party Law must be reformed, he argued, or voters will cast their votes for personalities and not parties.

16. (C) El Khyari neither fully agreed nor disagreed with Daoudi, but identified the problems as "social problems." Many institutions and their functions must change, she said. She used the example of parliament: the prime minister never comes to the parliament and parliamentarians do not fulfill their functions to assess and critique the prime minister. Ministers do not have command of their dossiers and are allowed twenty days to respond to parliamentarians' questions.

17. (C) Messari argued that the 2007 elections will be different because there needs to be rational political action. There is greater pressure on parties to consolidate. He agreed somewhat with Daoudi who views the merging of parties as a necessity. At the same time, Messari argued that no one wants to reject the democratic reforms already achieved -- people want democracy.

Are there Party Platforms?

18. (C) DAS Gray asked if there are formulated party platforms for the 2007 elections. Avoiding his question, the party leaders launched into discussing the history of the political parties, what defining the differences in the parties would mean and the lack of political debate in the country. When the DCM pressed the issue, Messari responded with platforms are "different for each party." The leaders were unable or unwilling to share platform ideas during the discussion, or to identify what would distinguish their parties from others or appeal to voters. They did not appear to have a strategy they could articulate to expand voter turnout.

Comment

19. (C) The discussion of the 2007 elections with these political party representatives was all inside the beltway politics. None of the participants demonstrated a focus on party platforms or programs that could help make parties credible or relevant in Morocco. IRI's ongoing interaction with political parties is intended to help address this, but, based on this discussion, there is a great distance to go before the parties will be prepared for an effective role in the 2007 elections.

¶10. (U) DAS Gray did not clear this cable.

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